

**THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE:
AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS**

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Wednesday, June 4, 2025

U.S. SENATE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 4:15 p.m., Room 216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Rick Scott, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Scott, Justice, Tuberville, Moody, Gillibrand, and Warnock.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICK SCOTT, CHAIRMAN

Chairman SCOTT. The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging will now come to order.

Today, we are gathered to discuss a very pressing issue, not just for our aging community, but for our country. The U.S. is the breadbasket of the world, thanks largely to family farms. Unfortunately, the farming and agricultural workforce is aging and nearing retirement, and fewer and fewer young people are looking to take over their families' farms or enter the agriculture industry.

With more farmers leaving the field and not having someone to pass their land and legacy on to we face significant challenges to agricultural production, rural community sustainability, and U.S. food security.

Here is why this matters: U.S. food security is national security.

American farmers are the Nation's oldest workforce, averaging 58 years old. One-third of farmers and ranchers are over the age of 65. In my home State of Florida, that number is even higher, accounting for roughly 40 percent of all farmers.

This group of aging farmers owns over 40 percent of U.S. farmland, and with more farmers retiring and fewer children looking to take over farms for their families, these farms and their legacies are at risk.

The U.S. has lost more than 200,000 farms since 2007. That is 40 million acres of land being repurposed for commercial, residential, industrial development, and 40 million acres of land that are no longer producing food and agricultural products in the United States.

There are many factors that contribute to this loss. Most farmers are not looking to sell land to a developer. They prefer to keep their family farm functional and to pass their hard-tilled land on to

someone who can continue their legacy and service to the community.

More and more young people are turning away from their jobs in farming and agriculture, due largely to the increased cost of farming, which is especially difficult for small farmers and those just starting out. This next generation of farmers are facing increased regulatory burdens and operating costs. The national price for farmland has increased over seven percent in three years, averaging \$4,000 an acre. Over 80 percent of farmers work a second job.

Farmers face many challenges, from natural disasters to inflation. Rising input costs, especially high energy costs, make continuing in the family business less attractive to younger generations. This is also true when accounting for death, property, and inheritance taxes that can make taking over a family farm overwhelming.

New farmers face even steeper obstacles, including access to land. As older farmers retire, foreign and adversarial entities, like Communist China, look to gain a stronger toehold in the U.S. agricultural sector by buying their land. At this point, China owns more than 350,000 acres of farmland across 27 states. That is not an acceptable threat. American farmers also must deal with unfair trade practices undercutting their product on an international level.

Congress has not always done right by our farmers. The major legislative package aimed at supporting farmers and agricultural workers—the farm bill—has not passed since 2018. This is especially harmful for farmers who have suffered with rising prices for the last four years under the last administration.

While President Trump is having success in bringing down prices and fighting to support American farmers, he needs Congress to act as well, and passing a good farm bill is the right place to start. Otherwise, we will continue to use outdated information which compounds the harm done by other economic and regulatory factors. As a result, the burden increases on our aging farmers who want nothing more than to see their farm continue in trustworthy hands but are finding it harder and harder to find someone to carry on their legacy.

The aging farm workforce and the loss of family farms presents a critical challenge to the sustainability of American agriculture. During this hearing, I hope to hear from our witnesses how we can better protect the heritage of our aging farmers and better secure the handover of farms to the next generation. We owe it to our retiring farm workforce to ensure their legacy can be continued, while ensuring our food supply and shoring up the security of our Nation.

Now I would like to recognize Ranking Member Gillibrand for her opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR
KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, RANKING MEMBER**

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we all know, our farm workforce is aging. On average, our Nation's farmers are

older now than they were when the last census of agriculture was conducted in 2017.

Because of financial stress, many farmers who would otherwise retire have had to keep on working. Some farmers have faced pressure to sell their farms to other owners if their family does not want to continue operations. Meanwhile, a lack of training and rural amenities, like broadband and childcare, have made farming less appealing to younger families.

Our farmers provide an accessible and abundant supply of food to our whole nation, but with increased consolidation and more farmlands being converted to non-agriculture uses, we are sending ourselves down a very risky path.

Our duty in Congress should be to support our farmers whatever way we can. With a changing climate, rising prices, volatile markets, our farmers are facing many challenges that make success even harder.

One of the most important things we can do is to pass a robust and bipartisan farm bill that addresses the needs of the agricultural community as well as nutrition and conservation needs. To encourage the younger generation to return to farming we must invest in our rural communities. New and beginning farmers and young people who are returning to their family farm do not only consider the income that is tied to farming. They need to be able to access broadband and childcare and health care. We need to make sure that there is enough mental health support at times when we see more farmers dying by succumbing to suicide.

I have to say that the anxiety and stress caused by the fluctuating tariffs that we are currently seeing has not helped. Our farmers need consistent policy to make long-term planting and investment decisions. They need reliability from Congress in an unpredictable profession. Approximately 20 percent of our agriculture is exported, and farmers rely on those markets to make a profit.

I look forward to a positive and productive conversation today to discuss ways we can support our aging farmers, while making sure new and beginning farmers continue to enter the farm workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Ranking Member Gillibrand.

I now would like to welcome our witnesses here today, all of whom bring important perspectives on the challenges facing the aging workforce that we see in American agriculture.

First, I am proud to welcome someone who has spent his life fighting for our farmers, Mr. Zippy Duvall, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation. Mr. Duvall is not only a national leader in agriculture, he is also a third-generation farmer from Georgia who understands firsthand the pressures our family farms are facing. He knows what it means to work the land, raise a family in agriculture, and build something to pass on to the next generation.

Mr. Duvall, thank you for being here. Thank you for your service to our Nation's farmers and ranchers. You may begin your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ZIPPY DUVALL, PRESIDENT,
AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, MADISON, GA**

Mr. DUVALL. Thank you, Chairman Scott, and thank you, Ranking Member Gillibrand. We appreciate the opportunity to be able to testify here today in front of you and your Committee.

I am Zippy Duvall, and I am a third-generation Georgia farmer, and I am president of the American Farm Bureau, who represents farm families from all 50 states and Puerto Rico. I am fortunate to follow in my father and grandfather in their footsteps on our family farm. Today, my son, who is a veterinarian to help support his habit of farming, we operate a beef cow farm, we raise broilers there on our farm, and we also have spent our lifetime restoring the land that has been in our family for over 90 years.

As I travel the country and see farms across our great country I see a lot of gray hair, and while the wisdom of older generations is critical, we must ensure that we make a way for young and beginning farmers to fill our boots.

As this Committee has identified, there are many challenges facing the agriculture communities, but there are also opportunities for Congress to support young and beginning farmers, including and starting with a new farm bill. As I shared with the Senate Agriculture Committee earlier this year, we need a modernized, 5-year farm bill. Farmers and ranchers have faced unprecedented volatility since the 2018 Farm Bill was put into place, making it harder for many of our farmers to hold on. The 2022 census showed the loss of over 141,000 farms in five years. That is an average of 77 farms per day that we have lost.

With rising interest rates, higher energy prices, supply costs that have gone unchecked, farmers will plant the most expensive crops ever planted this year, and many have faced a tough decision of whether or not to even plant that crop.

This is why the farm bill and Title I safety net is so critical.

Despite skyrocketing costs, the 2024 payments to farmers are projected to be the lowest since 1982.

Additionally, farm debt is expected to increase in 2025, to more than \$560 billion.

Our members support streamlining farm loan programs to meet the evolving needs of farmers and ranchers and to make agriculture more accessible to young and beginning farmers.

We are proud of Secretary Rollins for establishing a Small Family Farms Policy Agenda. It highlights the need to reform loan programs, to streamline the delivery and increase the program efficiency.

Adding to the uncertainty that farmers and ranchers and many other small businesses are facing is the possibility of the largest tax increase in American history. One provision that is critical to keeping family farms going to the next generation is the increase of estate tax exemption. If the exemption level reverts backward, many families will risk losing their farm. Farm Bureau was pleased to see the progress made with the House passage of the reconciliation package, and we urge the Senate to join to ensure America's farmers and ranchers can continue to provide the food, fuel, and fiber that our country needs.

Of course, we cannot paint the full picture on this issue without talking about our employees. Many of those employees are like family to us, and they are aging right alongside of us. That is a problem, because most Americans, they are not interested in working on our farms anymore, and they are not interested in coming back to the farm, despite the big investments that we are making in recruiting people to come back to the farm.

Congress needs to recognize that farm workers as an essential to feeding and fueling our country. It is time to modernize our outdated system, and only Congress can meaningfully do that.

A country that cannot feed its people is not a secure country. In order to meet the growing demand of food, fiber, and renewable fuel at home and abroad, we must ensure the continued strength of our farmers and ranchers in our communities.

I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing today, and I look forward to working with you to support the next generation of farmers, and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Duvall.

Next, we are pleased to welcome Jim Alderman, owner of Alderman Farms in Palm Beach County, Florida. Mr. Alderman has been farming since 1979, growing a wide variety of organic vegetables to managing a cow camp operation. He was recently named the 2025 Florida Farm Bureau Farmer of the Year, a well-deserved honor that reflects his decades of dedication to agriculture. He has also been a strong advocate for Florida farmers, speaking out on key issues like trade and labor, and serving on multiple advisory committees to help shape agriculture policy.

Mr. Alderman, thank you for being here today. You may begin your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JIM ALDERMAN, OWNER,
ALDERMAN FARMS, BOYNTON BEACH, FL**

Mr. ALDERMAN. Again, my name is Jim Alderman and I began Alderman Farms in 1979. We farm about 1,200 acres in eastern Palm Beach County. We are a very diversified farming operation—

Chairman SCOTT. Mr. Alderman, can you turn your mic on?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Sorry. It is on. Do you want me to start over, or where am I at?

Okay. Again, my name is Jim Alderman. I began farming Alderman Farms in 1979. We farm approximately 1,200 acres in eastern Palm Beach County. We are a diversified farming operation, growing mixed organic vegetables, and particularly vine-ripe tomatoes. We grow the finest vine-ripe tomato in this country. Trust me.

South Florida has a very unique climate, which allows us to produce vegetables during the winter months, but it also brings unique challenges—hurricanes, invasive pests, development pressure, and rising input cost. You learn to adapt, and you also learn that it is not a sprint. It is a lifelong commitment.

At the age of 78 years old, I have spent almost four and a half decades working the land. I still wake up before sunrise most days, like my peers. I am still going strong because there is more work to be done. According to the Committee's report, the average farm-

er is now 58 years old. In Florida, nearly 40 percent of our producers are 65 or older. We are proud of our experience and knowledge, but the question I ask is who is coming behind us? That is the part that keeps me up at night. It is just not growing crops. It is passing down the knowledge discipline in our way of life, but that chain of succession is breaking. Nationwide, less than nine percent of the farmers are under 35 years of age, and then the numbers are even more sobering in states like mine. Young people want to farm but they are running into walls, such as expensive land costs, expensive equipment costs, and the cost of financing is very difficult.

The big question is why are farmers selling out, without young men and women stepping in. The incentive to make a profit is not there. We may ask why can't they make a profit. The first reason that comes to me is that the imports are being shipped into this country below our production costs. If a farmer cannot make money, he is not going to expand his operation. If he has the opportunity to sell land, which was farmed for years, comes, sometimes the opportunity is too great. They sell, retire, and then development comes, parking lots, residential communities, and no agriculture.

How can we help farmers make it so we can be competitive with our neighbors to the north and our south? We have to be on the same level playing field.

Another problem farmers have is the invasion of invasive insects and diseases that have entered our country from other countries. For example, we have seen the citrus industry, with citrus greening, has devastated the citrus industry. We have gone from 240 million boxes of oranges in production to around 40 million boxes today, all because of an insect that came in with bacteria that causes citrus greening. I think that it would help our country if we had better inspections at our ports of entry to combat invasion of insects and diseases that come from other countries.

One of the other problems we have is that we are being over-regulated. Food safety is of primary concern for Alderman Farms. We are very careful to make sure that we have the safest produce coming from our farms. Presently, we have several food safety inspections. It would be great if we could only have one that serves all the different inspections that are required.

Again, farmers must make a profit. They must make money to continue their operation or they will take the easy way out, sell their property, and retire. Free and equal trade between our neighboring countries is a must, and as you know, labor is a major problem in agriculture. We are now depending on H-2A labor from Mexico, because we cannot get enough domestic labor to harvest our crops. Agricultural labor reform is a must.

If we want to sustain agriculture in America, we need to smooth the path between the generations, which means investing in beginning farmer programs, expanding technical assistance, and offering incentives like estate planning support, and make it easier to transfer farms without losing the land or the legacy. These are not just policy tweaks. They are steps in our food system to prevent eroding one generation at a time.

I come before you today not just as a farm but someone who cares deeply about the future of our country's food supply. We need strong, bipartisan action to support aging farmers invest in new generations, and keep American agriculture alive and well for decades to come.

Thank you for recognizing the urgency of this problem and thank you for allowing farmers like me to have a voice.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Alderman.

Mr. ALDERMAN. I will be glad to take any questions at any time, from anybody.

Chairman SCOTT. Perfect. Our next witness brings a critical perspective from the private sector, someone who has spent his career helping agricultural businesses find the talent and leadership they need to succeed. Mr. Aaron Locker is Managing Director at Kincannon & Reed, the largest executive search firm in the world focused exclusively on food and agriculture. He also knows this issue personally. He grew up on a small family farm in Ohio, and he spent more than three decades working across the Ag industry.

Thank you for being here. We appreciate your work, and we look forward to hearing your insights.

**STATEMENT OF AARON LOCKER, MANAGING
DIRECTOR, KINCANNON & REED, LEWES, DE**

Mr. LOCKER. Good afternoon, Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and members of the Committee. Thanks for the opportunity to testify before you today. As Chairman Scott pointed out, my name is Aaron Locker, and I grew up on a small farm in Ohio, and spent the last 36 years working in agriculture, from food production to executive leadership.

Today I serve as Managing Director at Kincannon & Reed. We are the largest executive search firm focused exclusively on identifying and recruiting leadership for organizations across the food and agriculture industries, the organizations that feed the world.

For more than 40 years, we have helped Ag organizations find and develop talent, and right now that leadership pipeline is under serious strain.

In 2025, more people will turn 65 than in any year in history. For every potential leader aged 35 to 50, two are preparing to retire. In agriculture, where many senior leaders have been in place for decades, this creates an acute succession challenge, and the next generation of leaders, especially those with agricultural backgrounds, is smaller than ever.

This is not a coincidence. The 1980's farm crisis did not just hurt balance sheets. It changed the interest in being involved in agriculture. The farm crisis did not just hurt those in production, but the ripple effect was across the industry. Between 1980 and 1990, while college enrollment went up seven percent nationwide, enrollment in land-grant university colleges of agriculture, like Texas A&M, Nebraska, Minnesota, Penn State, and Iowa State, to name a few, dropped by nearly 37 percent. That gap is being realized today, in boardrooms, field offices, and agronomy teams.

Meanwhile, the complexity of agriculture is growing. Precision and decision Ag technologies, automation, AI on the farm, and sustainability initiatives, they are moving fast, but fewer than one-

third of Ag companies that we work with have formal succession plans. That is not just a statistic—that is systemic risk.

Job growth in agriculture is steady, around three percent per year, but tech and finance are growing three times faster, so we are not just competing for talent. We are competing for leadership, and that matters, because as you mentioned, Chairman Scott, food security is national security.

Attracting and retaining the next generation also depends on profitability and predictability. When farmers and agribusinesses face constant regulatory uncertainty, and rising compliance costs, it discourages investment and makes leadership succession harder. To keep agriculture strong, we must reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens and ensure producers and those across the industry see a future worth building toward.

This is not a challenge the private agribusiness sector can solve alone. Congress does have a vital role to play, and I respectfully offer four recommendations.

First, pass a strong, fully funded farm bill. It provides stability for farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

Second, promote agriculture as a mission-driven, modern career path. No other sector blends health, nutrition, energy, and technology like agriculture. We have built the safest, most abundant food supply in the world, but that system will not sustain itself without the people who lead it. Young people and career changers need to see agriculture as a place to lead and innovative.

Third, invest in leadership development. Support USDA scholarships, executive fellowships, and training through land-grant universities and Ag nonprofits.

Fourth, strengthen rural workforce development. That means apprenticeships, veteran transitions, and community college Ag programs, and it means building career paths from urban and suburban areas into agriculture.

In closing, the food and agriculture industries are evolving fast, but our leadership pipeline is not keeping up. This is not just a workforce issue. It is a threat to our most essential system, our food supply.

If we want a strong, sustainable agricultural future we must invest in people. We just identify and support leaders early, and we must give them room to grow.

Thank you for your time and for your focus on this issue, and I, too, look forward to any questions that you may have.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Locker.

Now I would like to recognize Ranking Member Gillibrand to introduce her witness.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Chairman Scott. I would like to introduce Dr. Chris Wolf. Dr. Wolf is the E.V. Baker Professor of Agricultural Economics at Cornell University's Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, and the Director of Land Grant Affairs.

Dr. Wolf conducts research, extension, and teaching focusing on dairy products and policy, business management, risk management, and farm animal welfare. He also works with farmers to conduct research in order to identify how public policy impacts farm

behavior and financial outcomes with the intent of improving decisionmaking for policymakers and industry professionals.

You may begin.

**STATEMENT OF CHRIS WOLF, PH.D., E.V. BAKER
PROFESSOR OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS AND
DIRECTOR OF LAND GRANT AFFAIRS,
CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NY**

Dr. WOLF. Thank you. Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to be part of this hearing. As Senator Gillibrand said, I currently serve as the E.V. Baker Professor of Agricultural Economics at Cornell University, where I am jointly in the SC Johnson College of Business and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. I have a three-way split in research, extension, and teaching. I have been at Cornell since 2019, and mostly I do work on dairy policy and farm business management. I have taught farm business management and Ag finance for the last 25 years at the universities. I also serve as the Faculty Director of the New York FarmNet program.

In my home State of New York, which is currently the fifth-largest producer of milk, we are in the midst of \$2.5 billion in new, private sector investment in dairy manufacturing. To enable this growth, Cornell is focused on helping to ensure our family farms thrive, bringing the next generation back to the farm, increasing production in a sustainable way, and training both college-bound and non-college-bound students for dairy careers.

There are a number of explanations for the increased U.S. farm age. One is that there is a larger share of commercial farms that are multigenerational in nature. Rather than the kids operating separate farms, like they would have done maybe when I was thinking about going back to the farm, they return to the operation and become owners, which enables economies in size and production and management. In this case, the management team might have a younger average age that is masked by considering only the primary operator.

Modern agricultural production also tends to be quite capital intensive, and that capital accumulation occurs over the manager's lifetime, the result being that the average farm age is getting older.

Finally, given the USDA definition of the farm as "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the year," there are a large percentage of farms which are operated as part-time businesses, and there is nothing wrong with that, but this also means that if someone retires to some rural acreage they will be included as a farm and increase the farm age.

This is not meant to imply that there are no issues with farm viability related to increasing farmer age. These include hurdles that limit the entry of young people into farming and the need to facilitate the transfer of assets to the next generation while providing the resources necessary for the retirement of the older generation. Family-owned farms, which are 96 percent of U.S. farms, are closely held businesses. The farms tend to be of the size that meets the management constraints and the income needs of the family owner-operators. Because of the capital requirements, farm business assets are often the retirement plan for farmers. While

these farmers hope to pass the business to the next generation, they also need to recover the equity value to fund their retirement.

Attracting the next generation of farm business owner-managers means making the profession attractive in terms of income and rural amenities. Significant impediments to successful intergenerational transfer often relate to information gaps, and this is where land-grant extension programs can be a valuable partner.

New York FarmNet is a program that was created in 1986, in response to the farm financial crisis. The programs operate a tollfree number that responds to requests with a team of financial and mental health professionals to meet with farm families at no cost. Including mental health professionals was motivated by the alarming fact that farmers face much higher rates of depression and suicide than the general population.

FarmNet receives about 700 calls a year, resulting in about 400 new cases being opened. The remaining calls are referred to technical, accounting, or legal assistance. Sources of financial stress that FarmNet sees include price uncertainty, labor cost and availability, capital costs, land access, and estate and succession planning. Family related stressors include health issues, childcare, eldercare, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Agriculture ranks among the most dangerous industries in the U.S. with machinery accidents and injuries being common. Health care issues include not just the cost but also the availability and proximity. Farmers often report delaying or avoid health care due to cost, distance, and time constraints. Many farmers are underinsured or uninsured, especially those who are self-employed and operator small family farms.

Farm business succession is a major source of financial and family related stress on farms. FarmNet and Cornell Cooperative Extension and land-grants across the country offer educational workshops and materials on farm business succession and estate transfer. In 2024, FarmNet assisted farm businesses that represented over \$13 million in revenue, 600 employees, keeping more than 180,000 acres active in farming. FarmNet's experience is that managers who participate in these programs for estate planning and farm business transfer are likely to engage with attorneys and accountants to complete successful intergenerational transfer.

Applied research and extension land-grant programs like FarmNet can provide valuable assistance to help ensure successful farm business transitions and a healthy U.S. agricultural sector. Thank you.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Dr. Wolf. Now we will open it up for questions. Senator Tuberville.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having and holding this hearing. In addition to being on the Aging Committee, gentleman, I am also on the Ag Committee. Let me tell you, the state of agriculture economy, is in dire straits. We are in trouble. We have lost 150,000 farms, 25,000 farmers just in the last five years. Producers have lost over \$40 billion in net farm income since 2022, and the current agriculture trade deficit has grown to \$49 billion. Despite my State of Alabama, producers making bumper crops, they cannot even break even, much less make a profit, due

to the low commodity prices, high input costs, interest rates, and inflation. We cannot keep this up. We cannot do it.

The only way we are going to help our farmers survive is to extend President Trump's tax cuts, increase reference prices, and hammer the heck out of foreign countries on tariffs. It is way out of control, way out of balance. We cannot continue this direction.

It is concerning that one-third of our farmers are over age 65, and this creates a significant workforce problem for our Ag industry, as young people are not entering farming. Mr. Duvall and Mr. Alderman, this labor problem increases the need for reforms in H-2A programs. Can you two speak of the struggles of keeping up with H-2A's adverse effect wage rate that is over \$16 an hour, in my State of Alabama, that is double the minimum wage. Can you all address that, please?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Yes, sir, I can.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you.

Mr. ALDERMAN. It costs me an hour for my H-2A labor. Minimum wage in Florida, I think, is \$12.50. I am from Florida, and with the rates going up higher next year—they are talking about it going up another dollar—we still have to pay for their housing. We would like some relief at least so we could get the housing back from the people, the H-2A workers we are bringing in, but we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year just for housing for the labor, plus we have to bring them in here, pay for their visas, pay for their ride here, their ride back. They are great labor. They are good. Without them we could not harvest our crop.

We cannot compete with the cheap prices of tomatoes coming from Mexico against us. They are undercutting the price so cheap, the tariff that we are talking about is not enough to make any difference. Twenty percent, 17 percent, that is not enough to help it. They need a floor, at least what our minimum growing cost is, and then put a tariff above that, but try to protect the Florida farmers, the few that are left.

It is not only just in Florida. At first it was just Mexico was coming after Florida tomato farmers right after NAFTA. Well, 20 years later they are growing pepper and squash and corn and beans, and every vegetable we grow, all the way up the East Coast, all the way to Jersey and past, they are going to be competing with all of them, Mexico, with all those products, and their labor is—I don't know, what are they paying, \$10 a day, and we are paying \$25 an hour? There has got to be some help with the balance of trade.

We do not want the government to give us anything, but get us on a level playing field with Mexico and Canada.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. Mr. Duvall, do you want to add to that?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, sir. The first thing we need to do is for Congress to freeze the AEWR wage rate so that farmers do not have to take another increase and give us time to work on this H-2A program so that we can make it a workable program for our employees and for the farmer there. The way we are going now, with the wage rate going up, we are going to price ourselves out of farming. We are not going to be able to pay the wage rate and stay in farming and provide those jobs, and it has got to be done, and it has got to be done quickly.

Then we have got to work on creating an H-2A program, or a program, that speaks to all of agriculture. All of agriculture is suffering for the lack of labor, and we need to have year-round workers, that is not capped. We need to be able to control it, but we need to be able to fill those jobs, whether a small, medium, or large-sized farm, and we need to have those year-round workers in those areas, like dairy and other places where the work never stops.

Then, of course, the regulation to go along with those programs are just so burdensome. You heard him talk about the requirement of having housing, the liabilities that come along with that, and the difficulty it is for our farmers to continue to abide by all these regulations. Because every regulation costs a lot of money to a farmer, and if we are going to continue to be able to compete with the world, we have got to be able to make sure that we have a workable program, bring reliable labor here, so that we can get the job done.

How can a young farmer come back to the farm and bring his expertise that he learned in college, expand that farm without having a labor force to do it with? That is one of the biggest limiting factors we have, and that AEWR rate is set by a survey done through USDA that was created over 60 years ago to count employees, not to set a wage rate. The formula is totally unworkable, and we need to redo that formula and set a fair wage rate that encourages farmers to hire people and be able to still stay in business, and treat those employees right.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Senator Tuberville. Ranking Member Gillibrand.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Wolf, we have seen several different tariff levels imposed on various countries, at various points, on different goods in the last several months. This has impacted everything from feed costs, fertilizer, and machinery, increasing operation costs for a lot of our farmers who already work within very tight financial margins.

In the north country of New York State, many dairy farmers depend on Canadian feed and fertilizer for their operations. This has been a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship that we have had with Canada, and it has benefited businesses on both sides of the border.

Dr. Wolf, in your opinion, what possible outcomes can we expect to see if the United States continues to impose these tariffs, which may lead to both higher input prices and restricted access to export markets due to retaliatory tariffs?

Dr. WOLF. Senator Gillibrand, U.S. agriculture is dependent on trade, both for many inputs as well as for export markets for their outputs, so increasing tariffs and trade wars is certainly not something that are going to benefit U.S. farmers. For example, farms are dependent on inputs from Canada for things like fertilizer, lumber, and metal, so maintaining that relationship is better for the farmers, definitely there.

The U.S. dairy industry, which is what I mostly work with, on average exports about one day a week of the milk production, and the most important outlets for U.S. dairy exports are Mexico, Canada, and China, so maintaining that relationship is critical for U.S.

dairy. Without these exports, stocks would surge and milk prices would be depressed, and that would lead to more farm exits.

U.S. dairy farms are efficient, and they can compete with anybody in the global market, and I think that is what they want to do, but we have got to be perceived as a reliable trade partner, and that same statement could be made for a whole bunch of different U.S. commodities, from beef and pork to corn and soybeans.

In a broader sense, the uncertainty in the last few months, uncertainty tends to inhibit investment. When the outcomes and the probabilities of the outcomes are uncertain, that basically creates a positive option value to waiting on investment, which is what we are seeing in the last few months a little bit, so we are waiting on investments at a lot of different levels, and removing that uncertainty, I think, would help make U.S. agriculture a better, longer term investment and encourage investment in that sense.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Dr. Wolf. Farming is one of the most stressful occupations due to its unpredictability of climate, market prices, and labor shortages. The rate of suicide among farmers is two to five times higher than the national average, and approximately 60 percent of rural Americans live in a designated mental health provider shortage area.

I was proud to introduce the National Agriculture Crisis Hotline Act last Congress to establish a National Agricultural Crisis Hotline while expanding and supporting the current work undertaken by the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. Programs like the ones at Cornell, New York FarmNet, and the American Farm Bureau Federation's Farm State of Mind program are both critical to resources to support our farmers in moments of crisis.

President Duvall and Dr. Wolf, how should Congress expand resources to help our farmers access the mental health assistance that they need, and how can we reduce the stigma surrounding mental health in the agriculture community to encourage our farmers and ranchers to reach out when they are in need, before they are in a moment of crisis? Mr. Duvall?

Dr. DUVALL. Yes, ma'am. I take that very seriously because I remember when I was in dairy, when I was back on the farm, before I got this job, and dairying every day, I lost my wife of 42 years, my son went to war in Iraq, and with all the pressures of the farm I realized what those pressures do to a man, and us old farmers, we are kind of crusty. We sit in a back room and think we are not supposed to talk about our feelings, but that is the worst thing we can do. The stigma that goes along with it, the embarrassment that people think they experience is not really there, and really and truly, all they need to do is open up and talk. It is okay not to be okay, but it is not okay not to talk about it.

That is why we went and started our Farm State of Mind program, and we also joined up with Together All, which puts us in with a peer-to-peer group that farmers can be talking to each other, and free counseling for farmers and ranchers all over the country, to be able to be part of.

To support what you brought up, Georgia Farm Bureau and Georgia Foundation for Agriculture and Georgia Rural Health did a study, and it was very sobering the fact that 29 percent reported thinking about dying of suicide, of Georgia farmers, and when you

look at the younger generation, first-generation farmers, 49 percent of those first-generation farmers had thought about dying of suicide at least once a month. Those are devastating, devastating figures.

We have got to continue to work with Congress to make sure that we tear down these barriers that causes higher regulation, that causes pressure for farmers, find an answer to our labor problems that is workable for our farmers, and be able to work with them with an undocumented workforce. We, in agriculture, know that about 50 percent of the workers out there on the farm are undocumented, and those people are like family to these farmers, and we need a way to work through that situation that a broken system has created here in this country.

There are a lot of things that Congress can do, but being able to put them on a level playing field and trade, tear down regulation, help them find a workable workforce would go a long way to taking a lot of pressure off.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Dr. Wolf, do you want to answer?

Dr. WOLF. Sure, thanks. A couple of different things I would point out. One is that the big part of it, as Mr. Duvall mentioned, is overcoming the stigma, and I think that education and awareness can go a long way toward overcoming the stigma, so maybe a series of public service announcements collaboratively with groups like maybe American Farm Bureau and other commodity groups could help provide more awareness, and then accessibility. As you mentioned, a tollfree number that they can call, with trained counselors and resources, would have a positive impact, and also given the distance that many have living in remote areas, having telemedicine in addition to the tollfree number, with again, counselors and resources that understand what is going on in these rural areas and with farmers would be very valuable.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SCOTT. Senator Justice.

Senator JUSTICE. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much, and Ranking Member, thank you. I thank all you great Senators, and especially Senator Tuberville. You know, he and I are buddies, and we both are on the Ag Committee, and I want you to pay as close attention to me as you possibly can.

Our family has been in the farming business for a long, long, long time. We have got a real, real, real problem in agriculture, a real problem, and it is so serious, it is off the chart. You know, just think about it. Not only do we have a real problem, but we are getting old, and as we get older and everything, the problem gets more and more critical.

Now just stay with me just one second, if I were to tell you just this. America is the greatest country on the planet a million-fold, and with that we have the greatest, the greatest people, the most loving people, the very, very best of the best, but we are spoiled rotten. Any way you cut it, we are spoiled rotten on food. Absolutely, we are taking advantage of our small family farms beyond belief. You talk about taking for granted somebody and what they are doing with their work, that is what we do every day, and we will not address the problem.

The problem is really, really simple. If we do not do something about this, we are going to have a crisis, at some point in time, like

you cannot imagine. Now, it may be a ways away, but for God's sake, we surely to goodness deserve to have a farm bill, you know.

With all that said, you think about depression and suicide—and I could ask you a bunch of questions, but I am just going to talk, okay, and here is the deal. I mean, you just think about the average-sized, small family farm in America. The average size is about 430 acres. Now, if we could use 500, just for a second, and we could just think of these gentlemen that are right here, and just think, what could they sell their farms for? If they had a 500-acre farm, and many of them have a whole lot bigger than that, but if they had a 500-acre farm and it was worth—pick a number, I don't care—\$15,000 an acre, \$10,000 an acre, their net worth after they take care of some debt, is so substantial they could give the money to Goldman Sachs, never touch the principle, go somewhere and live, and honest to God, make ten times what they are making on the farm.

Now, just think about this. What if, at some point in time of life, some giant corporation, or God forbid a foreign country, ends up owning a tremendous amount of our farmland in America. Then think about just this. What if they just, all of a sudden they farmed one crop, put it in ungodly amounts of storage, and said, "The price on that corn is \$200 a bushel, and if you don't want to pay that, we are not selling it, and we are not going to plant again." At that point in time, we spin in a crisis like you can't fathom.

Now, if you want a mile-long food in a grocery store, paying 14 percent or whatever it is of your annual income toward food, quit taking advantage of these people. Quit taking them for granted. We are going, as a government, we have got smart people here that can figure out what to do, but we just do not put any passion and emphasis on it. We don't.

Now I have done this over and over and over and over, and I have said this forever more. The point in time when we, as a government, we, as our people, put real passion and emphasis and importance on this, we will solve it. If we do not solve it, it is going to bite us, and it will not be pretty.

With all that being said, like I said, I could ask you a bunch, a bunch of questions. There is no point in me doing that. I have been on this same rant a bunch of times because I am on the Ag Committee too, and I am telling you that I can see it coming. This is like being in a bubble. This is what they are doing. They are like in a bubble right now, and they are screaming. They are screaming they have got a problem, they have got a real, real, real crisis, we do not have young people going into farming today—why would they? I mean, they are not nuts. Why would they? Everybody is screaming in the bubble, and we do not hear them, and we best better hear them, America.

Mr. Chairman, I am done. Thank you, sir.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you, Senator Justice. Senator Warnock.

Senator WARNOCK. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for organizing this hearing. I want to recognize all of our panelists, but especially a great Georgian in the room, my friend, Mr. Zippy Duvall. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your voice on so many of these important issues, for being a voice for farmers

all across Georgia and all across our country, and for your lifetime of service.

As you know too well, in recent years it seems like Georgia farmers have been hit by one thing after another after another. It is a tough business, and there are so many things that you cannot control, like the weather, but in addition to that, rising input costs, and in addition to that, rising input costs and these weather events that we have seen in recent years that have created such setbacks for farmers, on top of all of that we are now dealing with pointless trade wars, and these trade wars will make it even harder to get their products to international markets.

I have been honored to work with many of my colleagues across the aisle to help our farmers get their products to markets, and now all of that is being disrupted in many ways.

Mr. Duvall, I have heard from Georgia farmers, particularly older farmers, who are turning to drastic measures like selling off pieces of their family's farmland and taking out second mortgages just to stay afloat. Are you hearing similar things from your Farm Bureau members and friends in Georgia's farming community, and if so, what concerns you about this.

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, sir. All across America I hear the same thing, and, of course, farmers basically right now are supportive of this Administration in their effort to try to level the playing field. We are all praying it all works. I will tell you, our Farm Bureau policy is that we do not support tariffs, because we know we are always the brunt of the repercussions coming from that.

We also know that our farmers have got to have that level playing field, because 20 percent of our income comes from trade overseas, and they have got to have it, so they are willing to wait.

What worries me most, and what I see most, references what you just said. We are seeing farmers have to sell part of their land to take another mortgage. When we get to this fall and we do not have solutions to the trade problems and the tariff problems, and everyone starts selling a very, very cheap commodity and cannot pay for the expenses, the inputs that they have bought to grow that commodity, and then they have to turn around the next month and go back to their banker and say, "I am ready to borrow my money to plant next year's crop," and he has not paid of last year's debt, we are going to be in serious, serious problems, and you are going to see farmers and ranchers all over this country go through mental health issues like you have never seen before since we saw in the 1980's with high interest rates, and it is going to be very, very difficult.

Senator WARNOCK. Feeling forced to sell their land, which has implications for all of us but certainly you cannot pass it on to the next generation. Since 2017, the average number of farmers over the age of 65 increased by 12 percent, just since 2017, so that is one of the things that happens when farmers are forced to sell.

Can you talk about some of the other consequences both for the farmers and for us?

Mr. DUVALL. If they are forced to sell and that land comes out of production, it never goes back into production, and there is so much competition now for land, it prevents young farmers and beginning farmers that want to go into agriculture—God help them—

have a difficult time finding that land to do that. Availability of land, availability of money, loans, is one of the biggest stumbling blocks young farmers and beginning farmers have going into the business.

Senator WARNOCK. Access to credit. All of these things. Would you say that the tariffs and the uncertainty that has been created around the tariffs have made it worse or tougher, even tougher in a tough business?

Mr. DUVALL. I think in the short term it has not really affected them yet, but when we get to this fall and they start selling their commodities, and if we do not have solutions to the tariff war, then we will have lost some markets that we have depended on for years, and then we will start seeing the crisis hit.

Senator WARNOCK. I think that is just the thing, the uncertainty, and you having to make decisions within the context of uncertainty. The people you would have to sell to, they are having to make decisions, all up and down, all across the trade zones, which makes it very, very difficult to plan.

Thank you for being a voice in this moment. It is my view that farmers are not helped by this increasing uncertainty, and we need to bring some sanity to this conversation about trade, which, by the way, Congress could do something about trade tomorrow, if we decided to do it. It is within the wheelhouse of Congress.

Thank you so very much for your testimony.

Mr. DUVALL. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman SCOTT. Senator Tuberville.

Senator TUBERVILLE. I have got one question. Mr. Locker, we will start with you—all of you can answer it if you want—your thoughts on this. As long as I have been up here I have been advocating to permanently repeal the federal estate tax, which is often called the death tax. I know it means a lot to farmers. Mr. Locker, we will start with you. Your thoughts.

Mr. LOCKER. Well, Senator, I think, obviously, you look at modern agriculture today. I mean, it is a massive investment. Even small farms, I mean, if you add up all of the assets, and so any time that you want to pass that along to the next generation, that comes at a significant cost, and in many cases it is cost prohibitive.

Yes, doing away with the death tax—and I think we get bottled in with other businesses, and it could not be farther from the truth in terms of comparable, that when you are passing along a farm business that comes with, like I said, a lot of cost, a lot of assets. It takes a lot to run a farm today, and so doing away with the death tax is the right thing to do, to be able to continue to pass it down to the next generation. Otherwise, it becomes cost prohibitive.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Mr. Duvall, have you got a—

Mr. DUVALL. Absolutely, one of the necessary things that we need to do. A farmer works all his life. I have spent my whole life buying back my farm my daddy had to sell part of it off. My whole life, and if we do not fix that problem, if we do not get rid of inheritance tax, other generations will have to sell the farm, and that farm will go out of production, and we will not enjoy the production from those farms, and it has to be done.

You know, it is just like people say, well, you have got a lot of land, you have got a lot of wealth. You have to have land to farm. It is just like having a tractor. It is just like having a car to go to work in every day, even if you are not farming. It is something that you have to have to do that job.

Show me a farmer that has a retirement plan. It is tied up in his land. It is tied up in his land, and when he retires, he has either got to sell his land or sell it to his children, and then if you pile inheritance tax on top of that, they have to sell part of the farm to be able to continue it, and it is one of the biggest, devastating things that can happen to a family farm when you have a death and you have to go through that difficult time.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Mr. Alderman?

Mr. ALDERMAN. I agree with you wholeheartedly. It is double taxation. It should not be there. You already paid the taxes once. Why are you going to just put somebody out of business or make them sell their business or their farm? It should not be there. I agree with you.

One other thing you might also think about—and this is not related to that, but somewhat. Years ago, and I am not an accountant, I am not a CPA. I am a farmer, and we know a little bit of a lot of nothing, you know, so some of the equipment I have been looking at of laser weeder, or your AI stuff that is coming around, it is \$1.4 million. I cannot afford it, but years ago we had a rapid depreciation schedule, where you could depreciate something real quickly and write it off quicker. Is that something that can be done? Maybe one of you professors know what it is now, but that would probably help some of the farmers out there do some rapid depreciation on farm equipment.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Mr. Wolf, your thoughts on estate tax?

Dr. WOLF. Yes, well, so with the increasing size of the commercial farms and with the average farmland value being \$4,000—and there are a lot of places where the farmers would be real happy to be able to buy more land for \$4,000 an acre, so that average is hiding a lot of much higher prices in some places.

Certainly there is an increasing number of farms that are running up against the potential to lose some of the value in an estate tax, and as the other witnesses have said, you know, you cannot give up the land usually and still be a viable farm, right. It is not like if you sell it, it is gone, so that highlights the need to do the farm business succession and estate planning, and if you do not do that, which is, you know, it is pretty easy to forget that, and nobody likes to do, by the way, estate planning. It is not fun. We all need to do it, but that is kind of admitting that you are going to have to have that at some point, so that is not fun to do.

Certainly it is different for farm businesses because they are small and medium sized, family owned, closely held businesses. It is fundamentally different than other types of businesses.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you.

Chairman SCOTT. Mr. Duvall and Mr. Alderman, has Mexico dumped any crops on farmers in the United States?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Yes.

Chairman SCOTT. Put your mic on, put your mic on.

Mr. ALDERMAN. Oh, its on.

Chairman SCOTT. Really? How do they do that?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Well, can I give you a personal example that happened to me two weeks ago?

Chairman SCOTT. Yes.

Mr. ALDERMAN. We are selling grape tomatoes to a company in New York State, okay, and our FOB price is \$16.50. We could not get the order. We have been selling them for quite a while and could not get the order this week. He said, "I can get them delivered from Mexico for \$10." I can't pick them, pack them, and grow them for \$10. I cannot pick them and pack them for \$10. We could not take the order. I am not going to lose money. I would just as soon dump it rather than having to lose money. We dump a lot of tomatoes. If we cannot sell them, we dump them. We do not have another market for them. It is not like corn or soybeans that you can keep and sell next month. If we do not have a market, it goes in to go feed the cows, so there is an example.

Chairman SCOTT. Why are your costs higher?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Why?

Chairman SCOTT. Yes.

Mr. ALDERMAN. Labor. As I mentioned earlier, H-2A labor is costing me \$24 an hour.

Chairman SCOTT. How did they come up with that?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Well, the—what do you call it, AEWR?

Mr. DUVALL. The Adverse Wage Rate.

Chairman SCOTT. Who did? The Federal Government did that to you?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Yes, sir.

Chairman SCOTT. Your friends at the Federal Government?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Am I friends of it?

Chairman SCOTT. No. Your friends at the Federal Government did this to you?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Well, you guys are friends, but you can do something about it. It is not fair, because we have to pay the housing for them, okay. It is \$16.50 an hour, I think it is, going up to—

Chairman SCOTT. You have to pay their way to get here? You have to pay their way home?

Mr. ALDERMAN. We have to pay their way here. We have to pay their visa. We feed them to get here. When they get here we pay for their housing, and when they go home we pay for their way home, their housing, everything.

Chairman SCOTT. How do they come up with the \$16.50 an hour?

Mr. DUVALL. Do you want me to answer that? The wage is set, the AEWR wage rate is set by a survey done by USDA that is 60 years old, that was created to count the number of employees on farms, not to set a wage rate. If you go look at the calculations in that wage rate and what sectors that they used to calculate it, they even used the wage rate of the H-2A workers to calculate it. How do you do that? That does not even make sense.

I have been all across this country. I have been in every state, out on farms, talking to farmers. I have found three farmers that filled out that survey, so who is filling the survey out, where is the data coming from, and why in the world would we set a wage rate based on a survey that is 60 years old and was not even designed to set a wage rate by?

Mr. ALDERMAN. May I suggest they go to Mexico and find out what the average rate that these men were making before they came over here to work for me or the other farmers or bringing H-2A workers? It is probably, what, a dollar an hour?

Mr. DUVALL. Plus the inspections and regulations that this gentleman and a lot of our growers have to go through—

Chairman SCOTT. They do not do that in Mexico?

Mr. DUVALL [continuing]. that they do not do in Mexico.

Chairman SCOTT. You mean, they sell it in our grocery stores without doing that?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Senator, one question I would like to ask. Have you ever seen the FDA in Mexico?

Chairman SCOTT. Nope. You are paying for things that they do not have to pay for in Mexico.

Mr. ALDERMAN. Exactly.

Chairman SCOTT. Do you think that our trade policy, we allow Mexico to dump tomatoes on Florida farmers is fair?

Mr. ALDERMAN. No, sir.

Mr. DUVALL. I did have the opportunity to visit Mr. Greer at USTR, and he and I talked about the dumping. It is not just tomatoes. It is cucumbers. It is bell peppers. It is cherries.

Chairman SCOTT. It's blueberries. It's strawberries.

Mr. DUVALL. It is cherries from Turkey dumping on what is happening in Michigan. It is all over the country. It is time for our country to stand up and say, "No more. You are going to dump your produce on our farmers."

Chairman SCOTT. Do you think the Trump administration is doing the right thing by, you know, what Commerce is doing with regard to eliminating the suspension agreement on tomatoes, what Jamieson Greer is doing to try to raise the tariff rates on produce coming from other countries?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Sir, it is hard to find out what this tariff Mr. Trump, President Trump is talking about. First it started at 20 percent. Now it is 17 percent. Let me tell you what will work, okay. If you have a minimum—what did you call it?

Chairman SCOTT. Price minimum.

Mr. ALDERMAN. A base that you have. Find out what it costs to grow a box of tomatoes in South Florida. I am going to say it is between \$12 and \$14 a box. Put that base in there, that they cannot sell it any less than that, and then charge them a tariff above that. Twenty percent is not enough. It will not slow them down. If you take away the minimum, whatever they call it, they take that away, now they can charge you five for a box of tomatoes and charge 17 percent tariff, it does not amount to anything. It is not going to slow them down a bit. If they had a 100 percent tariff on it maybe that would slow them down.

Go to other countries and see what they do. Go down to the Bahamas and see, try and ship a box of my tomatoes to the Bahamas and what happens. You will pay about \$20 a box tariff on, if there is a grower and they are growing tomatoes in Freeport or in the Bahamas or someplace.

It is not a fair policy. We would just like to be equal and fair so that we are on the same level playing field.

Chairman SCOTT. Senator Justice.

Senator JUSTICE. Well, Mr. Chairman, I do not have a whole lot to say. You know, I know these witnesses are superstars, and I congratulate you on all the honors and everything that you have been able to do in your lives. I would really be interested in how many folks are out here that are in some way, somehow, involved in agriculture, and I assume that it is most everybody.

I know this from the bottom of my heart, you know, that for those that are young, that live on the farm and grew up on the farm, you want to absolutely, in many situations, you want to stay there. You love it. You love it with all your soul. Every one of you loves it with all your soul. You do not want to give up that way of life in any way, and you are providing a service for all of us, off the chart, and why can't we get it? Why can't we really just get it, the fact that you have got somebody——

You know, a guy told me a long time ago. He was the president of Stanford Seed Company at the time. His name was Jim Billings, and Jim Billings said, you know, they were bought out by another seed company a little bit bigger. They were going to retain him and everything, and they asked him to write a job description. He said, "I sat down and I started writing, and I wrote 13 pages of single-spaced stuff of what I did every day. Then I just laid my pencil down and thought, and then picked it back up and said, see, the right person is in the right job and they are motivated." That is you. That is all of us that are in agriculture today. We are a production engine like you cannot imagine. You cannot imagine how good we are at what we do.

We are smart, too. We have got to solve this riddle, and it is as complicated as it can possibly be. You have got smart people that love what they do, and they are motivated by what they do because of their love. We have just got to solve the riddle. To solve the riddle, I have never seen a situation in my life that you can solve it until you absolutely place a level of importance on it, a big-time level of importance. If we do not solve it, shame on us. That is all I can say. I have stood on the top of the mountain and screamed until I am blue-green. You know, it is a real problem.

Mr. Chairman, thank you, sir.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you. Mr. Duvall, how important is it to buy American products? Why is it important that we grow our food, and that the food we put in our bodies is grown in America rather than places like Mexico?

Mr. DUVALL. Well, we have absolutely no clue what conditions or techniques are used in Mexico to grow that food, and it is——

Chairman SCOTT. We don't test it? We don't measure it?

Mr. DUVALL. They inspect it coming across the border. They do not have enough inspectors to be able to do it correctly. I think the Federal Government makes an attempt, but just like I said, when have you seen inspectors from America over in another country, inspecting that food before it leaves those farms and comes to us, like they do at his farm each and every day?

It is important for us to realize, like in your opening statement, that food security is national security. If we all are old enough to remember the long gas lines when we had to sit in line to get gas, and how it almost brought our country to its knees. If we all remember how scared we were when COVID hit, and all of a sudden

we saw some shelves at the grocery store empty. If you do not solve our labor problems and put profitability back in agriculture, and young people not coming back to it, we will live to see that day again in this country, and we will be depending on some other country, whether it is on our land or their land, to feed us. We will not be a secure country.

Chairman SCOTT. If you could do three things that would impact the American farm, what would be the top three things?

Mr. DUVALL. Got to fix trade. Got to fix labor. Got to have a farm bill.

Chairman SCOTT. All right. Mr. Locker, from your position working with Ag businesses, what trends are you seeing in terms of workforce aging, not just on farms but within the companies that support Ag?

Mr. LOCKER. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I mean, we are seeing it across the board. First and foremost, the whole agribusiness community obviously is driven by the health of the farmer. By having a farming population that is profitable, predictable, that drives everybody.

Now we are coming off an almost 40-year period of pretty stable workforce coming off the farm. That, as I mentioned in my opening statement, is drying up. It is irrespective of whether it is crop inputs, Ag machinery, retailers, cooperatives. All of them across the industry are facing the same thing, and because many of the executive leadership has been in place for 30, 40 years, in agriculture.

What we are faced with is what happens when—and I saw a statistic not too long ago that up to half of the current executives across agribusiness could be retiring between now and 2035, and with that goes all that institutional knowledge. All of the services, all of the technology, all of the things that we do to help the farmer produce, like I said, the largest and safest food supply on the planet, all of that institutional knowledge can go away. It is definitely an issue that we are facing.

Now, we have done a lot of things recently, working with companies, on succession plans, on mentorships, and even an interesting conversation I had the other day with a company that they are even looking, because of technology and AI, reverse mentorships, actually pairing young people with the senior executive to help them understand the next generation of leaders and how you talk to them and how you get them attracted to agriculture, as well as technology.

The trends are there, and what I would say—and Senator Justice, I could not say it any better—we need a stable farming community which starts with a farm bill. Once we get that stabilized, then the investment comes back in, the investment in technology, the investment in the tools that the farmers need. Because right now, much of that investment is being held up because of lack of predictability, lack of profitability at the farm, and so we need that stability.

Then the other thing I would say, to close with, is we need a greater share of mind in the U.S. today about agriculture. We need to attract a whole new generation of future leaders to agriculture. Because by being able to say, look, agriculture has transformed and we are going through another technology transformation as we speak, like a lot of industries are, with AI and on-farm automation,

and so the technology and the domain experience that we are going to need to attract to Ag is going to be unparalleled over the next several years.

I think by working with Congress to say, yes, we have said it more than once today, food security is national security. Let's get a narrative out there that says, and because of that, we need to attract more people into the agriculture community, now more than ever before.

Chairman SCOTT. Thank you. Dr. Wolf, from your research what are the most significant financial barriers facing aging dairy farmers who are looking to retire or transition their operations to the next generation?

Dr. WOLF. Senator Scott, the biggest problem is to be actively engaged in farming and be able to transfer or sell those assets at a fair value so that you can fund your retirement. Because again, these farmers, they do not have 401(k)'s or 403(b)'s. Their money is tied up in the farming assets, so they have got to make it work, and there are ways to do it, but it takes planning ahead of time, and it takes considering things like long-term leases and land contracts and things like that to make it work, and if you do not do that, then it becomes infeasible.

Tax policy is part of it, and there are some things that we have in the tax code that work now, and some things that you maybe are thinking about extending that could help. Again, a lot of it is just an information problem. Also, as Mr. Locker pointed out, I think correctly, where we definitely see more people want to go into agriculture when it is profitable. If you grow up on a farm and it looks like your parents are struggling, it is not something you are going to want to come back to, so that is definitely key.

Chairman SCOTT. Mr. Duvall, you have talked to Jamieson Greer, and I assume you have talked to Secretary Rollins. We are talking about trade policy. It takes two people to get a deal done, right? Do you think we are better off to just leave it as it is, or try to improve our trade policy to stop the dumping?

Mr. DUVALL. We have to try to improve our trade policy. What we have done in the past has not worked. We have not regained some of the markets that we lost in the trade war eight years ago. We need trade deals. We need access. We need certainty, and you give our farmers a level playing field, they will compete with anybody on Earth. Yes, of course, especially during harvest time, tomatoes, strawberries, they should not be able to be allowed to dump here on top and just depress the price to the point where the farmer cannot successfully run a business under all of the rules and regulations that cost them tons of money to abide by in this country.

Chairman SCOTT. What Secretary Rollins and Secretary Lutnick and Trade Rep Grier are trying to do, do you think, you know as difficult as it is, it is worth trying, to try to improve our trade policy with other countries.

Mr. DUVALL. That is what I hear our farmers say. Short term, they are willing to take the pain. Long term, we have got to have solutions. They cannot handle it for a long period of time. When we go into this fall, with this expensive crop that is in the ground and

the cheap commodities that they are going to have to sell, it is really going to be difficult for our farmers all across America.

Chairman SCOTT. Mr. Duvall, when you talk about the farm bill, what is in it that is important to you?

Mr. DUVALL. Renewed Title I with increase in reference prices. Continued support for crop insurance. You know, a farmer, small, medium, or large, growing whatever he might grow, deserves to have a risk management tool, that he participates in, to be able to cover his risks that he has got in that crop. It ought not be limited to certain commodities. It ought to be widespread to all commodities, all sizes of farms.

Research and development dollars are so crucial. That is what keeps us on the cutting edge of agriculture. That is what keeps us the leading production place in the world is the research and development dollars that are spent at great universities like Cornell and University of Georgia and University of Florida.

Then, of course, our conservation programs. These lands that we accumulate, that we have to have the farm on, those natural resources, and our neighbors, we all are entitled to have and protecting that. Farming does not allow the luxury of a farm to make enough money to do all that protection, so conservation programs—140 million acres have been voluntarily put in conservation programs across America—that is the size of California and New York—because it was voluntary and the government participated in helping us protect those natural resources on the land.

All of those programs, and even the trade part of the farm bill, where we help sell products, our products overseas. All of those programs are so important to agriculture in the farm bill. That is why we have got to have—we have been kicking this can down the road two years, and the uncertainty has caught up with our farmers. It has caught up with our bankers. It is going to catch up to the American people.

Chairman SCOTT. Mr. Alderman, you have been dealing with all the red tape of the federal and local governments and state governments. What would be your top three things that you would want to change that would have a positive impact on your farm?

Mr. ALDERMAN. You mentioned crop insurance a minute ago, okay. Crop insurance needs to be analyzed to take into consideration the specialty crops that we grow. I can lose a whole crop in south Florida with a hurricane, like we did in October, and have crop insurance, and still do not qualify for getting paid. We take it out every year, but crop insurance was written out in the Midwest, for Midwestern farmers, and has no idea about vegetable farmers in South Florida, and we just never qualify. We have to have it. That would help.

I think some of the regulations that are coming down from the FDA right now, from some of my neighbors, it is really scary whether they will be able to continue farming because of them. If they are going to come inspect everything and every little thing that there is going to be then maybe they should try to help us find out what the problem is and help solve the problem, like coming in, "I have got you. Now I'm going to put you in jail." It is really bad, because this is America. It is supposed to be free. We have got a government that, years ago when I was a kid, government actu-

ally helped you. You had different agencies that helped farmers do things, and they would survey your land for you and get it level, and do so many things for you, but today, all that is gone. I guess there is some part of it still left.

The inspection part of it, with what the FDA is doing—one of my neighbors, one of my friends, just last week, it is terrible. It is terrible.

What other problems would I have? We just want a level playing field again. Make it so that we are competitive with our neighbors to the south and to the north. I mean, Canada grows a lot of hot-house tomatoes that compete with us every day, on the shelves in the grocery stores.

We would like to be fair. I do not want the government to subsidize anything I grow. If we are competing with countries that are subsidizing their farmers, do something to make it a level playing field. I am not smart enough to figure out what that would be. You have got some economists, again, but put something on it so we are on a level playing field. Just get us equal.

Chairman SCOTT. If you would tell somebody going to a grocery store, that is buying produce, why would they buy an American product rather than a product from China or Mexico? Why should they do it?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Number one, we have got food safety regulations that we have in every farm out here now. I hire a full-time person. That is all she does is food safety. She goes around with swabs, measuring stuff every day, sending them off to find out. Our food is safe here, the safest food in the world. I would not hesitate—that is true. You do not know what you are getting from Mexico or Guatemala or any of these other countries. I have been to those countries and I see how they farm and what their safety protocols are, which they do not have any, so that would be it.

It is fresher, if you buy my tomatoes, I pick it today and it is in the market tomorrow. It is not sitting in a cooler for two days, three weeks, or on a trailer coming from wherever, from Chile. It is picked here, it goes to the grocery store warehouse that evening, and it is in their store the next day. It is fresh.

Chairman SCOTT. Right now your produce is inspected, and we allow people to send produce into our country without an inspection.

Mr. ALDERMAN. I do not think that is quite true. They do inspect loads coming across the border. It is not only the food safety part of it. It is what I mentioned earlier, the invasive insects and diseases. We get a new thrip coming into South Florida every two years, and it takes us three or four years to figure out how to combat it or take care of it. It is either thrips or pepper weevils or some new disease, a new virus coming in on tomatoes from another country.

I do not know what the answer to it is. You cannot stop shipping it in. We have got to have it, I guess, and it is not only vegetables. There are diseases and insects coming in on plants, on flowers. All that stuff comes into the Port of Miami and Miami International Airport. They get a bad lot of it and it goes to the junkman, and the next thing you know that insect takes over and we are fighting it for the rest of our lives. Cannot get rid of them.

Chairman SCOTT. You have been doing this for 45 years?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Probably longer, closer to 50.

Chairman SCOTT. Do you like it? Why do you like it? Why do you like being a farmer?

Mr. ALDERMAN. I like growing things. I like to see things grow.

We were talking about stress earlier. I could not do anything else. I could have been a road builder, gone into construction in South Florida. You know how busy it is there, but I chose agriculture.

Chairman SCOTT. When you go out to the farm, is it great to be around the animals?

Mr. ALDERMAN. Well, I did have some animals, but tomatoes are not animals, but I love watching a crop grow. You know, I do not physically do the work anymore, but there is nothing on that farm I have not done, from picking to everything there is. I started with zero.

Mr. DUVALL. I farm because I love my animals. He and I just had the greatest visit, talking cows. I mean, I absolutely love spending time with—

Chairman SCOTT. What kind of cows do you have?

Mr. DUVALL. Sir?

Chairman SCOTT. What kind of cows?

Mr. DUVALL. I have beef cattle, mostly Angus. A few white ones here and there.

Mr. ALDERMAN. That is the most relaxing, clearing your head out, is to go ride and look at the cows. Take the day. You have got to drive two hours from where my ranch is, and go count calves, look at the cows, figure out how much grass you have got, how much water we got, and take care of those animals.

Mr. DUVALL. Rotational grazing, doing all the right things for the grass and the soil to make sure it grows. Using chicken litter on my farm for fertilization, using comprehensive nutrient management plans that the County Extension office helps me—

Chairman SCOTT. Do you grow your own hay?

Mr. DUVALL. I grow my own hay. You know, I mean, it is so rewarding, and probably the biggest, biggest benefit, asset of being a farmer is being able to raise your children there. When my son went to war, his commander officer wrote me a handwritten letter, and he says, "When I started working your boy, I knew he was from the farm, and I wish I had a whole, whole troop like him," because he had the work ethic. Raising my children on the farm, making them understand how to take care of not just plants but animals, and do it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord, not for the man, there is nothing more rewarding than that.

There is nothing more stressful and disappointing than to go to the mailbox, pull out all the bills and your paycheck and not having enough to pay the bills with, after you put your heart and soul into it, and watch your heart break when your children cannot come back and do it, and make a living. We all would love to do it.

Chairman SCOTT. What are we going to lose if we lose our family farms? What is the biggest thing we are going to lose?

Mr. DUVALL. We are going to lose a way of life that built this country, and the values that we learned, of loving, caring, whether it is soil, people, animals. Just good old living.

Mr. ALDERMAN. It is a way of life that cannot be replaced.

Mr. DUVALL. It cannot be replaced, and it is not matched anywhere else.

Mr. ALDERMAN. You cannot buy it. You cannot sell it. You cannot replace it.

Chairman SCOTT. Well, I want to thank everybody for being here. I look forward to continuing working with all of my fellow Senators.

If any additional Senators have additional questions for the witnesses or statements to be added, the hearing record will be open until next Wednesday at 5:00 p.m.

I want to thank all of you. I want to thank you for being here. I just think farming is just a really rewarding opportunity and way of life. Thanks for being here.

[Whereupon, at 5:45 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Prepared Witness Statements

U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

"THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE: AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS"

JUNE 4, 2025

PREPARED WITNESS STATEMENTS

Zippy Duvall

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and members of the Committee, including from my home state of Georgia, Senator Warnock, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Zippy Duvall, a third generation Georgia farmer and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, representing farm families in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. I am fortunate to follow in my father and grandfather's footsteps by taking over our family farm. Today, my son and I operate a beef cow herd, raise broiler chickens, and have restored the land that has been in our family for over 90 years.

The latest USDA Census of Agriculture revealed that nearly 40% of all farmers are at or beyond retirement age, while just 8% of farmers are under the age of 35. As older farmers outpace younger farmers, we should all be concerned about the future of family farms and the security of our food supply.

As this Committee identified in its March 2025 report, "America's Aging Farm Workforce," there are many challenges facing the agriculture community, but there are also opportunities to support young and beginning farmers and help sustain the current agriculture workforce, including a new farm bill.

Farm Economy and Farm Bill Reauthorization

I shared this with the Senate Agriculture Committee earlier this year, and the urgency has only increased since then. We need a modernized, five-year farm bill. Farmers and ranchers have faced unprecedented volatility since the last farm bill was reauthorized in 2018. A pandemic, record-high inflation, rising supply costs, and global unrest have hit family farms, making it harder for many to hold on. Sadly, the 2022 census showed the loss of over 140,000 farms in five years. That's an average of 77 farms per day.

This year, farmers will plant one of the most expensive crops ever. Due to rising interest rates, higher energy prices, and input costs that have gone unchecked, many farmers face the tough decision of whether or not to plant a crop. This is why an increase to the farm bill's Title I safety net is critical.

USDA's most recent Farm Sector Income Forecast has shown a \$41 billion decrease in net farm income, down nearly 25% from 2022. Since crop prices peaked in 2022, they have taken a nosedive. Corn and wheat are down 37%, soybeans down 28%, and cotton down 22%.

At the same time, input prices have remained high. As compared to 2020, the cost to produce an acre of corn has grown by nearly 30% nationally. The combination of low crop prices and high supply costs has many farmers facing losses on every acre they plant. Despite these increased costs, 2024 payments to farmers are projected to be the lowest since 1982.

Access to Credit

Additionally, farm debt is expected to continue to increase in 2025 to more than \$560 billion. That's a half trillion dollars in debt. As farms continue to carry larger debt loads without increasing net cash revenue, they also experience worsening credit. In previous years, farmers and ranchers supported their credit with continuously increasing farmland values, but those increases have slowed. As farms lose options to support continued borrowing and use up their limited working capital, many farms may close before reaching the point of bankruptcy.

Our members support streamlining farm loan programs to better meet the evolving needs of farmers and ranchers. This includes ensuring loan amounts reflect rising farm-level expenses and reducing burdensome application requirements for young and beginning farmers to better align with standard agricultural lending practices. We also support prioritizing access to direct and guaranteed loan funds for applicants who are either new to farming or experiencing temporary financial hardship due to adverse ecological or industry-related conditions. We commend USDA Secretary Rollins' Small Family Farms Policy Agenda. It highlights the need to reform loan programs to streamline delivery and increase program efficiencies.

2025 Tax Legislation

At a time of great economic uncertainty, farmers, ranchers and many other small businesses are facing the prospect of what may be the largest tax increase in American history. Failing to extend the expiring provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) would take billions of dollars out of farmers' pockets when they have no dollars to spare. One provision that is crucial for keeping family farms going from one generation to the next is the increased estate tax exemption. If the exemption level reverts, many families risk losing their farms. Congress must find a way to create a stable business environment by making permanent the expiring TCJA provisions and ensuring America's farms and ranches can continue to provide the food, fiber and renewable fuel this country needs. Farm Bureau was pleased to see progress made with the House passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act two weeks ago.

Farm Labor

Of course, we cannot paint the full picture on this issue without talking about the employees who work alongside us. For many of us, they are like family, and they are aging right along with us. That's a problem because most Americans don't have any interest in working on a farm, despite big investments in recruitment. Congress must confront that reality and do something about it, starting with necessary reforms for our agricultural workforce. That means modernizing our outdated system by making crucial improvements to the H-2A guest worker program and recognizing farmworkers as essential to feeding and fueling our country.

AFBF Young Farmers and Ranchers Program

Finally, it can be difficult for young farmers to find peers to connect with and share ideas. Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers (YF&R) Program creates space for that connection-fostering collaboration, leadership development, and community for young leaders. I would not be where I am today without Farm Bureau's county, state, and national YF&R program. I made lifelong friends and gained leadership skills that continue to serve me well today.

Farm Bureau is proud to support young agricultural leaders, but we need your partnership to ensure they can thrive.

A country that cannot feed its people is not secure, and to meet the growing demand for food, fiber and renewable fuel at home and abroad, we must ensure the continued strength of our farming and ranching communities. I look forward to working with you to support the next generation of farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee has.

U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

"THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE: AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS"

JUNE 4, 2025

PREPARED WITNESS STATEMENTS

Jim Alderman

Good afternoon my name is Jim Alderman. I own and operate Alderman Farms in Boynton Beach Florida. I am proud to be a lifelong farmer and honored to represent Florida agriculture here today. I have the privilege of serving as the 2025 Florida Farm Bureau Federation farmer of the year. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about an issue that affects me personally, the aging of the American farm workforce.

I began Alderman Farms in 1979. We farm approximately 1200 acres in eastern Palm Beach County Florida. We are a diversified farming operation, growing mixed organic vegetables and particularly vine, ripe tomatoes, the finest tomato you'll ever eat in the US. South Florida has a very unique climate which allows us to produce vegetables during the winter months, but it also brings unique challenges, hurricanes, invasive pests, development pressure, and rising input cost. You learn to adapt, you also learn that it is not a sprint, it's a lifelong commitment.

At the age of 78, I've spent almost 4 1/2 decades working the land. I still wake up before sunrise most days like many of my peers. I am still going strong because there's more work to be done. According to the committee's report, the average farmer is now 58 years old. In Florida, nearly 40% of our producers are 65 or older. We're proud of our experience and knowledge, but the question I ask is who is coming behind us? That's the part that keeps me up at night. It's just not growing crops. It's also passing down knowledge discipline in our way of life, but that chain of succession is breaking. Nationwide less than 9% of the farmers are under 35 years of age and then the numbers are even more sobering in states like mine. Young people want to farm but they're running into walls such as land being expensive. Equipment is even more expensive. The cost of financing is very difficult.

The big question is why are farmers selling out, without young men and women stepping in. The incentive to make a profit is not there. We may ask why can't they make a profit. The first reason is that imports are being shipped into this country below our production costs. If a farmer cannot make money, he's not able to expand his operation. If he has the opportunity to sell his land to make money, then development comes in parking lots, residential communities, and no agriculture.

How can we help farmers make it so that we are competitive with our neighbors to the south and north? We have to be on the same level playing field.

Another problem farmers face is the invasion of invasive insects and diseases that come into our country from other countries.

For example, we have seen in Florida that citrus greening has devastated the citrus industry. We have gone from 240 million boxes of oranges in production to around 40 million boxes today, all because of an insect that came in with bacteria that causes citrus greening. I think that it would help our industry if we had better inspections in our ports of entry to combat the invasive insects, and diseases that come into our country.

One of the other problems we have is that we are being over-regulated. Food safety is of primary concern for Alderman Farms. We are very careful to make sure that we have the safest produce coming from our farms. Presently we have several food safety inspections. It would be great to have one inspection that would serve everyone.

Again, farmers must make a profit. They must make money to continue their operation or they will take the easy way out and sell their property and retire. Free and equal trade between our neighboring countries is a must as you know labor is a major problem in agriculture. We are now dependent on H2A labor from Mexico because we cannot get enough domestic labor to harvest our crops. Agricultural labor reform is a must.

If we want to sustain agriculture in America, we need to smooth the path between generations which means investing in beginning farmer programs, expanding technical assistance, and offering incentives like estate planning support and make it easier to transfer farms without losing the land or the legacy. These aren't just policy tweaks, they are steps in our food system to prevent eroding one generation at a time.

I come before you today not just as a farmer, but as someone who cares deeply about the future of the country's food supply. We need strong, bipartisan action to support aging farmers invest in new generations, and keep American agriculture alive and well for decades to come.

Thank you for recognizing the urgency of this issue and thank you for giving farmers like me a voice.

U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

"THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE: AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS"

JUNE 4, 2025

PREPARED WITNESS STATEMENTS

Aaron Locker

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to testify on a challenge that is rapidly reshaping the future of American agriculture. I appreciate your time and your dedication to the future of the American agriculture industry. My name is Aaron Locker, after growing up on a small farm in Ohio, this is my 36th year of serving US agriculture. I am now a Managing Director at Kincannon & Reed, the world's largest executive search and leadership development firm identifying and recruiting leaders exclusively for organizations that feed the world.

For over 40 years, we've partnered with organizations across the food and agricultural value chain-from producers and processors to biotech startups and global food brands. Our mission is simple: to help organizations that feed the world find and develop the leadership they need to thrive. Today, I'm here to sound the alarm on a crisis that is unfolding quietly, but rapidly, across the heart of our industries, and the consequences for our food supply, our rural communities, and our national security are serious.

The Leadership Vacuum

We are moving from a forty-year period of stable senior leadership in farms, agribusiness, and agricultural organizations into a period where the pipeline of "farm-grown" leadership is scarce. More and more, organizations will be required to look to younger leaders or outside the traditional talent channels. In 2025, we will reach a global record for the number of people turning 65. For every potential leader aged 35-50, two are preparing to retire. In agriculture, where many senior leaders have been in place for decades, this creates an acute succession challenge.

What is more concerning is that the next generation of leaders, especially those from rural and farm backgrounds, is significantly smaller. That is not by accident.

A Shrinking Talent Pool and the Legacy of the Farm Crisis

The 1980s farm crisis didn't just damage balance sheets. It changed the outlook for talent across the agriculture industry and the outlook for entire communities. Many parents, understandably, discouraged their children from returning to the land or pursuing careers in agriculture. While college attendance overall rose nearly seven percent between 1980 and 1990, enrollment in land grant colleges of agriculture- like Texas A&M, the University of Nebraska, University of Minnesota, and Iowa State University and others dropped by nearly 37 percent.

Despite the continued strength of land-grant institutions, the share of students in agricultural programs has remained small and, in some cases, has declined or stagnated over the past decade. That gap is now showing up in boardrooms, field offices, agronomy teams, management and executive benches across the food and agriculture sector.

Complexity Is Rising, But Leadership Is Lagging

At the same time, the business of agriculture is growing more complex. Today's operations require fluency in data analytics, automation, sustainability metrics, and global trade. Precision Ag and automation are growing at over 12 percent annually, but the leadership capable of connecting new technologies with practical farm and business applications is in short supply.

Fewer than one-third of the agribusinesses we work with have a formal succession plan in place. That is not just a statistic-it is a systemic risk.

Job growth in agriculture is steady at three percent annually, but industries like tech and finance are growing three times faster and are drawing top talent away from the food system. We are not just competing for attention-we are competing for leadership.

No other sector blends health, nutrition, energy, and technology like agriculture. We have built the safest, most abundant food supply in the world, but that system will not sustain itself without the people who lead it. Food security is national security.

Profitability and Regulatory Certainty Are Essential

Attracting and retaining the next generation of farmers and agribusiness leaders also depends on ensuring that agriculture remains a profitable, sustainable career path. That means reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens, improving clarity across agencies, and providing a policy environment that rewards innovation and risk-taking. When producers and agribusinesses are buried under duplicative regulations or face constantly shifting standards, it creates uncertainty that discourages investment and succession. We must ensure that those working in agriculture see a viable economic future, one that supports reinvestment, transition planning, and long-term commitment to the land.

What Congress Can Do

This is not a challenge that the private sector can address alone. It will take bold, coordinated public-private leadership. Congress has a vital role to play. I respectfully offer four recommendations:

1. Pass a Strong, Fully Funded Farm Bill A comprehensive Farm Bill is the foundation of long-term stability for the agriculture industry. It empowers rural development, research institutions, and workforce training programs to invest in the future with confidence.

2. Promote Agriculture as a Purpose-Driven, Modern Career Path We must reposition agriculture as a high-tech, mission-focused sector. Congress should support a national campaign to highlight agriculture as a high-tech, purpose-driven career path-one that welcomes diverse and forward-thinking talent from all backgrounds.

3. Invest in Agricultural Leadership Development Support USDA-backed scholarships, fellowships, and executive leadership training in partnership with land-grant universities, community colleges, and agricultural nonprofits. The next generation of Ag CEOs, researchers, sustainability officers, and policy experts must be equipped and empowered to lead.

4. Expand Rural Workforce Development and Urban-Rural Talent Pathways Congress should strengthen community college Ag programs, fund apprenticeships, veteran transitions, provide relocation and retraining support to professionals entering agriculture from nontraditional backgrounds. We must build bridges that connect talent to opportunity in rural America.

Conclusion

The industries of food and agriculture are changing faster than ever, but our leadership pipeline is not keeping pace. This is not just a workforce issue. It is a threat to the resilience of the most essential system in the country-our food supply.

If we want a competitive, sustainable future for American agriculture, we need a serious, sustained investment in people. That means identifying and supporting leaders early, removing the barriers that discourage their entry, and creating an environment where they can grow and succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I commend the Committee for its focus on this issue and welcome your questions.

Respectfully submitted, Aaron Locker Managing Director Kincannon & Reed

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JUNE 4, 2025

PREPARED WITNESS STATEMENTS

Chris A. Wolf, Ph.D.

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to be part of this hearing. I currently serve as the E.V. Baker Professor of Agricultural Economics in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University where I have been a faculty member since 2019. I have a three-way split that includes research, extension and teaching. My research and extension program focuses on dairy markets and policy as well as dairy farm finance and business management where I provide information and analysis and decision-making aids for industry stakeholders and policymakers. I have taught Farm Business Management and Agricultural Finance classes for the past 25 years. I also serve as the Director of Land Grant Programs and Faculty Director of the NY FarmNet program.

My home State of New York is the fifth largest producer of milk is in the midst of \$2.5 billion in new, private sector investment in dairy manufacturing. To enable this growth, Cornell is focused on helping ensure our family farms thrive, bringing the next generation back to the farm, increasing production in a sustainable way, and training both college bound and non-college bound students for dairy processing careers in the primarily rural areas where dairy manufacturing is locating. Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Cooperative Extension Service are top ranked. At Cornell, we are proud to be in the Ivy League but, unique among the Ivy League Universities, also situated in the public system affiliated with the State University of New York as a contract college.

It has become conventional wisdom that first, farmer age is increasing and second, this is a problem for the long-term viability of food and fiber production in the US. Not surprisingly, there is a great deal of nuance to the actual statistics and industry implications. It is undeniably correct that average (and median) farm operator age has been increasing over time. However, it is also true that relative to the U.S. population, U.S. farmers have become slightly younger (i.e., the average/median U.S. age has increased relatively more than the average farmer age). There are a number of explanations for the increased age of U.S. farmers. One is that there are an increasing share of commercial farms that are multi-generational in nature. Rather than the kids (or grandkids) operating separate farms, they return to the operation to become owners and enable economies of size in production and management. In this case, the management team has a younger average age that is masked by considering only the primary operator. Another explanation is that the changing role of farmers from being a combination of management and labor to primarily managing the labor and capital enables a relatively older person to run a farm. Modern agricultural production tends to be quite capital intensive and that capital accumulation occurs over that manager's lifetime. The result is that the average farm age will be older. Finally, given that the USDA definition of a farm is "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the year" there are a large percentage of farms that are operated as part time businesses or hobbies (and there is nothing wrong with that). This definition also means that if someone retires to some rural acreage, they will be included as a farm and increase the average farmer age.

This is not meant to imply that there are not issues with farm viability that are related to increasing farmer age. These include hurdles that limit the entry of young people to farming and the need to facilitate the transfer of farm assets to the next generation while providing the resources necessary for the retirement of the older generation. Family-owned farms, which are 96 percent of U.S. farms (2022 Ag Census, NASS), are closely held businesses. The farm business tends to be of the size that meets the management constraints and income needs of the family owner-operators. Because of the capital requirements, the farm business assets tend to be the retirement plan for many farmers. While many farmers hope to pass the business on to the next generation, they also need to recover the equity value to finance retirement. Three areas must be transferred to maintain the farm business across generations. First, income which can be transferred by paying a wage, bonuses, and

profit sharing. Second, ownership which can be transferred by allowing the next generation to gradually acquire property. Business organization options such as corporations or LLC can facilitate transfer of farm business assets which can be sold or gifted. Finally, management can be transferred gradually through responsibilities for certain enterprises or management areas.

In contrast to the 1980's, there is currently a great deal of energy and opportunity in U.S. agriculture for new entrants in farming as well as related industries from technical service providers to food retailers. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture (USDA-NASS, 2024), in 2022 young producers (those under the age of 35), accounted for 9% of the country's 3.37 million producers. Eighty-one percent of young producers started farming in the last 10 years, and 64% reported having a primary occupation other than farming. Young producer operated farms accounted for 15% of U.S. agriculture sales and 12% of U.S. farmland (Census of Agriculture). Attracting the next generation of farm business owner/managers means making the profession attractive in terms of potential income and rural amenities including availability and proximity to childcare and healthcare. Some of the impediments to successful inter-generational farm transfer-for both the older and the younger generations-relate to information gaps. This is where land-grant extension programs like Cornell Cooperative Extension can be a valuable partner.

NY FarmNet is a program that was created in 1986 in response to the farm financial crisis. The program operates a toll-free number that responds to requests with a team of financial and mental health professionals to meet with farm families at no cost. Including mental health professionals was motivated by the alarming fact that farmers face higher rates of depression and suicide than the general population. For example, male farmers have a suicide rate 3.5 times higher than the national average (National Rural Health Association). Financial stress is one of the primary contributors to the depression and suicide rate. Additionally, mental health stigma and lack of access to care are major barriers.

NY FarmNet receives about 700 calls a year resulting in 400 new cases being opened annually. The remaining calls are referred for technical, accounting, or legal assistance. The stressors that FarmNet consistently finds in the farm population are financial as well as family issues. Sources of financial stress include price uncertainty, labor cost and availability, capital costs, land access, and estate and succession planning. Family-related farm stressors include health insurance, childcare, eldercare, and drug and alcohol abuse. Agriculture ranks among the most dangerous industries in the U.S. Occupational hazards such as pesticide exposure, machinery accidents, and musculoskeletal injuries are common. Healthcare related issues relate to not just cost but also availability and proximity. Transportation barriers affect access to care, especially for older farmers and those in remote areas. Farmers often report delaying or avoiding healthcare due to cost, distance, or time constraints. Many farmers are underinsured or uninsured, especially those who are self-employed or operate small family farms. Telehealth is a promising development for farmers in remote areas but broadband access remains limited in many rural areas, hindering telehealth expansion. As of 2024, 22% of rural Americans still lacked reliable high-speed internet.

Farm business succession is a key source of financial and family-related stress on farms and FarmNet consultants work with client families regularly on this issue. NY FarmNet and Cornell Cooperative Extension offer educational workshops and materials on farm business succession and estate transfer. In 2024, FarmNet assisted farm businesses that represented over \$13 million in revenue and 600 employees keeping more than 180,000 acres actively in farming. 90% of FarmNet clients viewed the service as valuable and would recommend it to others. FarmNet experience is that farm managers who participate in programs aimed at estate planning and farm business transfer are likely to engage with attorneys and accountants to complete a successful inter-generational transfer. We believe that FarmNet is a model that would be useful across the country. Funding for land-grant applied research and extension programs can provide valuable assistance to help ensure successful farm business transitions and a healthy U.S. agricultural sector.

Questions for the Record

U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

"THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE: AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS"

JUNE 4, 2025

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Zippy Duvall**Senator Jon Husted****Question:**

There are approximately 30 federal laws and 15 different federal agencies that govern food safety. What can Congress do to streamline and coordinate this oversight and reduce the number incidences of food borne pathogens in the food supply such as salmonella and E.coli?

Response:

American consumers can be confident the food they are consuming is safe and secure thanks to the careful practices of farmers and ranchers and our nation's science-based regulatory system. Protecting a safe and healthy food supply to meet public demand is critical for national security. Federal oversight of food safety is vast with multiple agencies and laws governing it.

While USDA should be the lead agency in the development and administration of food safety guidelines and should serve as the sole federal agency responsible for food inspection and safety, the current system is confusing and duplicative across several agencies. Until then, USDA and FDA should work more collaboratively with current guidelines to benefit food producers. For instance, growers are subject to multiple, often unpredictable, food safety audits throughout the year between state and federal government regulators and retailer/distributor requirements. These duplicative inspections result in costly inefficiencies and red tape that could be avoided by harmonizing these audit requirements without sacrificing our robust food safety standards, which are grounded in sound scientific risk standards. Additionally, we support having employees from state agencies acting as authorized agents of FDA to conduct federally authorized inspections mandated under the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Improvements to the food recall system are needed as well. Overly broad public announcements on food recalls with incomplete information devastates growers of specific products within their limited market windows. It can result in market distortions that needlessly shift production in certain regions and lead to seismic loss of markets. To mitigate against these effects, investments in food safety technology to improve accuracy and timeliness of recalls must be prioritized to avoid sweeping announcements that undermine confidence in the food system and preserve the viability of domestic growers.

Any legislative and regulatory efforts to streamline regulations and minimize redundancies for farmers and ranchers without sacrificing our high food safety standards is welcomed and appreciated. American Farm Bureau will continue to monitor initiatives to improve and streamline food safety to ensure that policies and procedures are in place that further build the trust and reliability in U.S. agriculture for the benefit of our farmers and ranchers as well as consumers. We welcome federal lawmakers to be productive partners in improving our food safety system that protects consumers and bolsters farmers and domestic food production.

Statements for the Record

U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

"THE AGING FARM WORKFORCE: AMERICA'S VANISHING FAMILY FARMS"

JUNE 4, 2025

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD

BPR Lab Statement

BPR Lab, a multidisciplinary group of geriatric physicians, board-certified healthcare architects, and bioethicists, appreciate the opportunity to submit comments for the Special Committee's hearing on physical activity in older adults. Our area of expertise is the impact our built environment has on the mobility and physical activity of older adults.

It has long been known that architecture shapes the activities of people within a building. What is new is the extent to which architecture impacts the health of its occupants. In some cases, those effects are similar in scale and scope to that of medications and procedures. The study of these effects, Evidence-Based Design (EBD), seeks to uncover these relationships. Our work at BPR Lab focuses on leveraging EBD to increase the benefits and reduce the harms to people in healthcare facilities through an understanding of causes and effects. Fall prevention and promotion of mobility are two such effects with far reaching personal and financial costs.

Opportunities to improve these effects through architecture stand as an untapped vector to increase quality of life for older Americans and stem taxpayer costs. Falls are the leading cause of injury and among the leading causes of death among older Americans. In 2020 over 42,000 Americans died due to falls.¹ Medical care related to falls of adults over 65 years old was estimated to be \$50 billion annually (2018),² of which approximately \$29 billion and \$9 billion came from Medicare and Medicaid funding, respectively.³ In 2020, that number had risen to \$80 billion⁴ and by 2030 the cost is expected to exceed \$100 billion annually.

While the CDC's Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries campaign (STEADI) is a well-known U.S. Government effort to reduce falls in older adults,⁵ there are lacunas with which the Special Committee could help. Among the implemented recommendations made by Geriatric medical societies is the screening of home environments for elements within that increase the risk of falls in older adults.⁶ However, a variety of structural factors continue to limit the practice of basing long term care facility design decisions on empirical data. While the knowledge is highly translatable, the mechanisms that support and promote medical research do not have a parallel in the architecture and construction of healthcare facilities. Our work promotes a non-regulatory mechanism for the incorporation of EBD.

As healthcare-built environments are studied more, physicians and architects are understanding the relationship between design elements and different health outcomes better. While the interaction can be complex and much remains to be known, what we do know demonstrates the personal, ethical, and financial value of action, considering the frequency of falls in older adults and their cost to the health system and U.S. Government. For example, a recent study demonstrated that simply changing lightbulbs in a long-term care home to increase short-wavelength light during the day and decrease it overnight decreased falls by 43% compared to a control site.⁷

¹Santos-Lozada AR. Trends in Deaths From Falls Among Adults Aged 65 Years or Older in the US, 1999-2020. *JAMA*. 2023 May 9;329(18):1605-1607. doi: 10.1001/jama.2023.3054.

²Florence CS, Bergen G, Atherly A, Burns E, Stevens J, Drake C. Medical Costs of Fatal and Nonfatal Falls in Older Adults. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2018 Apr;66(4):693-698. doi: 10.1111/jgs.15304. Epub 2018 Mar 7. PMID: 29512120

³National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (U.S). Cost of Older Adult Falls. Published 2020 July 9. Accessed 2025 June 22. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/122747>

⁴Haddad YK, Miller GF, Kakara R et al. Healthcare spending for non-fatal falls among older adults, USA. *Injury Prevention*. 2023;30(4) <https://doi.org/10.1136/ip-2023-045023>

⁵Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). About STEADI. Published 2024 April 22. Accessed 2025 June 22. <https://www.cdc.gov/steadi/about/index.html>

⁶Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults. Published 2017. Accessed 2025 June 22. <https://www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/steadi-brochure-checkforsafety-508.pdf>

⁷Grant LK, St Hilaire MA, Heller JP, Heller RA, Lockley SW, Rahman SA. Impact of Upgraded Lighting on Falls in Care Home Residents. *J Am Med Dir Assoc*. 2022;23(10):1698-1704.e2. doi:10.1016/j.jamda.2022.06.013

As professionals in this area, we continue to observe preventable harms and the missed opportunities to reduce falls in older adults. Whether in hospitals, long-term care facilities, or in home environments, evidence-based practices for fall reduction are inconsistently and optionally applied. We also see the benefits of improving environments, often with additional expertise from our colleagues in Physical and Occupational Therapy.

We applaud the Senate Special Committee on Aging's focus on fall reduction in older adults. As the US population ages, this topic will become increasingly germane to many Americans and their loved ones. The potential cost-savings to the federal government and for families' out-of-pocket expenses by implementing evidence-based practices to reduce falls in older adults is immense, in addition to the basic improvement in older adults' quality of life.

Recommendations

We urge the following specific actions:

- Congress should establish an Advisory Committee to develop a National Falls Prevention Plan and advise CMS to address falls prevention through home modifications and mobility-focused interventions. The evidence base is sufficient to support the proposed pilot program for Medicare coverage of home modifications when recommended by a medical professional, to decrease the rates of falls in the home.

- The federal government should support ongoing research into design-based fall reduction strategies. The federal government has the capacity to study relationships between health outcomes and design elements due to its access to large and inter-related datasets. The federal government should continue to partner with researchers in both academia and private industry to publicly disseminate research of high quality.

- The federal government's potential investment into built environment modifications should support interventions recommended by medical and design professionals who demonstrate evidence to support their ability to reduce falls. As evidence grows, the federal government should adjust their reimbursement based on the recommendations of medical and professionals with relevant professional experience and minimal conflicts of interest.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on this important topic. Our views do not represent those of our employers but are based on the authority of our respective professions. We look forward to working with you to reduce the risk of older adults' falls through evidence-based design interventions.

Sincerely,

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